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JUL 16 1934

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Phillip Page

PLACE AUX DAMES! It has been a woman's month in the theatre in that the two outstanding plays have been written by women and of the four best performances three have been by actresses.

Miss "Gordon Daviot's" "Queen of Scots" at the New Theatre was inevitably greeted by suggestions—even from those who like it and I have yet to find anyone who does not—that it is not another "Richard of Bordeaux." Of course it is not. We have one "Richard of Bordeaux" and we do not want another. None-the-less, it stands on the same plane of romantic history, made the more attractive by absence of fustian and the cloak-and-swordism which has cluttered up nearly every non-Shakespearean drama through the centuries.

Miss Daviot also has the sense not to write near-Shakespeare. The simplicity of her language, so far from getting us away from the period, puts us right into it because it allows us to realise the humanity of the people with whom she is dealing. Whether or no her Mary, Queen of Scots, with Darnley, Rizzio, Bothwell, Moray, Ruthven and the rest of them, are historically accurate or agree with the various conceptions of them held by each member of the audience (an obvious improbability, this) is beside the point and, from the stage point of view, comparatively unimportant. What is important is that she has taken seven years of the Queen's life and has made a living drama of it.

By Miss Gwen Pfrangon-Davies in the title rôle she is nobly helped. Mr. Lawrence Oliver's Bothwell is brusque and virile and Mr. Glen Byam Shaw, the Darnley, became con-

vincing just before the peculiarly *macabre* murder-scene—the more impressive because of its restraint—but not until then.

Miss "C. L. Anthony" Dodie Smith (why do these clever women refuse to write under their own names?) has touched lucky with "Touch Wood" at the Haymarket. Luck has, however, very little to do with the position except in the matter of this ideal theatre and the selection of Mr. Basil Dean as producer; for this is the type of play at which Mr. Dean excels and his instinct for the right cast is unfailing. Miss Smith shows an immense advance on her two previous plays, neither of which was negligible.

"Touch Wood"—the story of a married couple who have reached the dangerous period which Sir Arthur Pinero, in only slightly different circumstances, labelled "mid-channel," who drift apart, and who are brought together again by common-sense as much as anything else—shows greater penetration, a stronger sense of character, and a quiet yet irresistible humour in place of her earlier romanticism.

Mr. Ian Hunter and Miss Marie Ney play the husband and wife immaculately. Miss Dorothy Hyson, impetuous girl-hood bent on shipwrecking them, did not have to rely on her astonishing prettiness to win sympathy in an essentially unsympathetic part. She is hardly more than a child; but she knows the effects to get and how to get them. In short, an accomplished actress. Miss Flora Robson plays a "good sort" with skill; there is hardly anything she cannot play. Mr. Stafford Hilliard contributes a pathetic sketch of a male abandoned, which, unlike the abandoned male, can never be an heroic figure.

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

I thought "The Private Road" at the Comedy a delicate and whimsical little play. It may be thin soup, but that is better than thick soup in the hot weather. And it is admirably served. With that of Miss Ffrangcon-Davies at the New Theatre and all the performances of Miss Margaretta Scott at the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park, I would place Miss Dorothy Dickson's perfect comedy in "The Private Road" among the afore-mentioned three actress-successes of the month. Miss Dickson has a few things with which to contend—beauty so compelling that it compels the unthinking to imagine, and the unimaginative to think, that its possessor can have no other gift, and a musical-comedy reputation, which is apt to provoke the comment "Oh yes, very very charming, but—" In truth here is a comedienne of subtlety and experience, who never forces the note and who showed that she could carry this play with ease. "*Summa ars est celare artem.*"

I should add that Miss Scott is not the sole asset of that admirable enterprise in Regent's Park, though a strong and charming one. All the Shakespearean productions are on a very high level and Milton's "Cosmos" was an interesting experiment which must certainly be repeated.

Mr. Seymour Hicks has found a big and deserved success in "Vintage Wine" at Daly's. Here is an extremely funny play, with moments of pathos, which, however, requires some tactful handling. The adventures of an amorous grandfather might easily pall or even become slightly unpleasant. Of course Mr. Hicks, with his alluring vitality, does not look like a grandfather, but that does not detract from the brilliance of his performance. Miss Claire Luce blondes her way through a good part quite cleverly and Miss Julie Neilson is the very picture of dignified and dictatorial old age.

There have been several egregious failures, upon which I need not enlarge except to add that they deserved to fail.

Messrs. Ashley & Son will publish this month an acting edition of "Black Coffee," the detective play in three acts by Agatha Christie. The play which was originally produced at the Embassy Theatre, and subsequently transferred to the Little Theatre, has as its central character the author's best known figure, "Hercule Poirot." There is one interior scene throughout and the cast consists of ten men and three women. The author's agent is prepared to accept a royalty calculated on a percentage basis.

"THE ROCK."

Mr. T. S. Eliot's morality play, "The Rock" was produced for a fortnight at Sadlers Wells Theatre on behalf of a fund for building new churches in outer London. This, however, was far more than a charity performance, and was perhaps the most notable stage effort which has been accomplished in the sphere of Religious Drama during the present century. There was about the whole concern a sincerity and naturalness which linked this play definitely with such a work as "Everyman." The acting was unequal, and some of the scenes would have benefited by a reliance on impressionistic rather than on realistic methods; but on the whole, Mr. Martin Browne's production was wonderfully effective, and considering that the various scenes were presented by actors drawn from various London parishes and only brought together at the last moment, it is doubtful if any other producer could have achieved a more splendid result.

Mr. Martin Shaw's music was just what was wanted to give vitality and emphasis to the various episodes, while students of the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art contributed choric verse-speaking which did full justice to Mr. Eliot's magnificent verse commentary on the prose action of the play.

We can only hope that "The Rock" may be continuously revived, and perhaps one day may be given a production entirely worthy of the play itself. If this happens, one might suggest the omission of some of the merely spectacular episodes. There was a good reason for their introduction at Sadler's Wells, but the logical development of the play was slightly hindered by scenes which, beautiful in themselves, added little to the dramatic conception as a whole.

One may sum up the matter by saying that this production showed just how much amateur effort can achieve when inspired by a noble theme and directed with intelligence and sympathy.

RUNNYMEDE PAGEANT.

The Runnymede Pageant was blessed with fine weather and brilliant sunshine throughout, which made its success certain. The site had natural advantages, in the little stream at the back and the gently rising hills behind, and it was made into an acting area by an enclosure of canvas castle walls, with large gates. With so large an area, it was probably wise to abandon the idea of dramatic effect, and to concentrate entirely on "pageantry"; of which Miss Gwen Lally so fully understands the possibilities. The joust, arranged by the Black Prince, was extremely interesting, and very great care had been taken over the heraldry used in such profusion; the Black Prince himself (an excellent horseman), was an effective figure cantering up and down as master of the ceremonies in his black coat-armour, and with his black and white banner. Another scene, thoroughly enjoyed by the audience, was the race run before Queen Anne at Ascot; the audience here was quite at home, and undoubtedly took its proper part in the drama.

The massing of all the scenes, entering through different doors, with the light shining through their banners, had considerable beauty, and their final slow retreat to the singing of the hymn "O God, our help in Ages past."

A NEW BARN THEATRE

ITS CONCEPTION AND SOME PROBLEMS

By Frank Thornton-Bassett

IN fairness to the reader one cannot proceed with the subject without saying something about the Estate upon which this unique Theatre has been instituted and the simplest way will be to give an extract from a handbook issued by the Trustees of the Estate in which it is stated that, "Dartington Hall Estate, Totnes, was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. L. K. Elmhirst in 1925, for the purpose of establishing a centre for research in rural industries and into problems involved in the development of the British countryside. In the execution of this plan a number of industries have been established and registered under the name of Dartington Hall Ltd. The shares in this Company are held by a Trust, under terms of which any profits received are to be expended upon research and development."

The many and varied activities that go on in this beautiful corner of Devonshire may be stated briefly in the following list: The Poultry Farm, the Orchards Dept., and the Cider Mill, the Woodlands, the Sawmills, the Gardens Dept., the Textile Dept., an Arts and Crafts Studio, the Pottery and various Farms; then approaching a little nearer to our subject, there is a Primary or Nursery School for children of both sexes from two and a half to six, and a Junior School where pupils of both sexes are taught by the co-education method from about eight to fifteen, and then the Art side on which there is a School of Dance Mime, the Leder School of Ballet, and the Jooss Ballet, which has recently made its training centre at Dartington, and lastly, we come to the Drama Group around and for which the Theatre was founded. Before getting on to the technical interest of this building I will give the foreword printed on the programme at the performance of "A Doll's House" given at the official opening of the Theatre on the 17th May, 1934.

"The Theatre up to the time of its conversion has, I suppose, functioned as the main barn for the Barton Farm for the best part of 600 years. It was probably an addition of the late 14th century to the early 15th century that included the gymnasium, archway and studios, since there were signs of weathering

on the walls of the main entrance to the Theatre that could only have occurred before the barn was added. When laying the floor for the old engine room at the east end of the barn, we found the foundations of a round tower which must have dated from very early times when Dartington was a strongly fortified manor.

The roof underwent repairs and probably some reconstruction in 1821, but it is of 16th or 17th century pattern which the recent restoration has very carefully followed.

The reconstruction of the Barn as a Theatre was made possible out of the proceeds of the Play "Journey's End," and will always be a reminder of the joint efforts in 1929 of Mr. Sheriff, Mr. Maurice Browne, and the Founder Trustees.—L. K. E."

In designing this theatre, Miss Ellen Van Volkenburg and Mr. Richard Odlin have had great difficulty in preserving an ancient monument and at the same time converting it into as modern a home of the Drama as possible within the dimensions of four walls square and a very beautiful timbered roof.

The Stage is rectangular in shape, 45 feet from the front edge to the back of the domed cyclorama and 23 feet 5 inches wide. There is an interesting breaking away from the conventional by the introduction of a four inch rise in the stage level about 17 feet 6 inches from the front edge, and this new level extends to the back including the revolve which is seventeen feet in diameter and placed at the back of the stage with a space of 3 feet 4 inches between it and the cyclorama. This cyclorama is one of the most interesting developments of the scheme, but it is also quite a problem in its own. It extends from the diameter line of the revolve to the back wall of the barn and is domed to the height of the lower tie-beam, is constructed of plaster and has its support underneath the stage on the concrete flooring and is painted egg-shell blue. Two sets of stairs descend from the diameter line of the revolve and follow the same contour as the cyclorama, the whole making a very attractive and formal frame for most exteriors.

A NEW BARN THEATRE

Two great problems arose when Miss Van Volkenburg produced "A Doll's House," as it is an interior scene and we were confronted with the difficulty of having no ceiling or means to hang borders and also the problem of masking the upper part of the dome, which would of course show over the top of the flats. We got over the first snag by the simple means of screwing cornice moulding round the top of the flats and frankly leaving the top 'open' and using the roof of the barn to suggest the ceiling, which it did. To cut out the upper half of the dome (the lower half was being used as a back drop), we just nailed up some sacking behind the beam nearest the cyclorama and the effect was delightful, though I distinctly remember wishing, when I was putting it up, that I had been born with some of the agility of the monkey; however, it will be seen from the accompanying photograph that the resultant effect of the whole décor was very pleasing.

As will be seen from the sketch there is no provision for either Proscenium or Act Drop. There was a preliminary performance of "The Women of Ghent" written by Miss Barbara Ling, in which screens were used, rather after the fashion of fire screens, only each leaf was eleven feet high and two feet wide and kept at even angle by a chain at the back, and the whole contraption mounted on runners, and this was pulled on, half from each side and met, with luck, in the centre. This arrangement was not too good, especially when a quiet scene which finished in a 'black out' was spoilt by the thunderous noise of these screens being rattled across the stage by even more 'rattled' assistants! so these were scrapped and it is now the wish of the designers that producers will formalise certain actions so that scene changes may be done quite openly, as was practised in Shakespeare's theatre and in the Chinese theatre of to-day on which principle the screens were originally based. "Curtains" must of necessity be fade-outs. It remains to be proved whether this plan will always be possible and successful.

With a stage constructed inside a building of this nature and which has very little space at the sides, one of the chief concerns of a stage manager is where to put the scenery that has been struck. There are two seven feet openings, one on each side of the stage about ten feet from the front of the floats and these are the only ways of getting out flats at

stage level. This has been simplified somewhat by extending the stage level round the back to the dressing rooms and on the P.S. or right, behind the S.M.'s corner, a ramp is to be made sloping down underneath the passage to the back, and flats can then be run off, turned, and stacked along the outer wall. As the line of sight is through the opening and along this passage, a masking partition is to be built (the Theatre is not yet completed) about four feet from the inner wall and this can then be used in any scene calling for the use of a corridor in sight of the audience.

Mr. Richard Odlin, who is responsible for a great deal of the design of the Theatre, has devised a unit set of flats; a number of ten by four and some ten by two as well as an arch piece and door, these all pin-hinge and will fit together in innumerable shapes, for the last production we had to add to the stock by making a small door flat, a fire place and flat and other pieces to fill in the two spaces down stage. The flooring of the stage being of teak it was found at rehearsal to be too noisy, and the whole surface was covered with lino so that flats can only be counterweighted as screws would damage the surface.

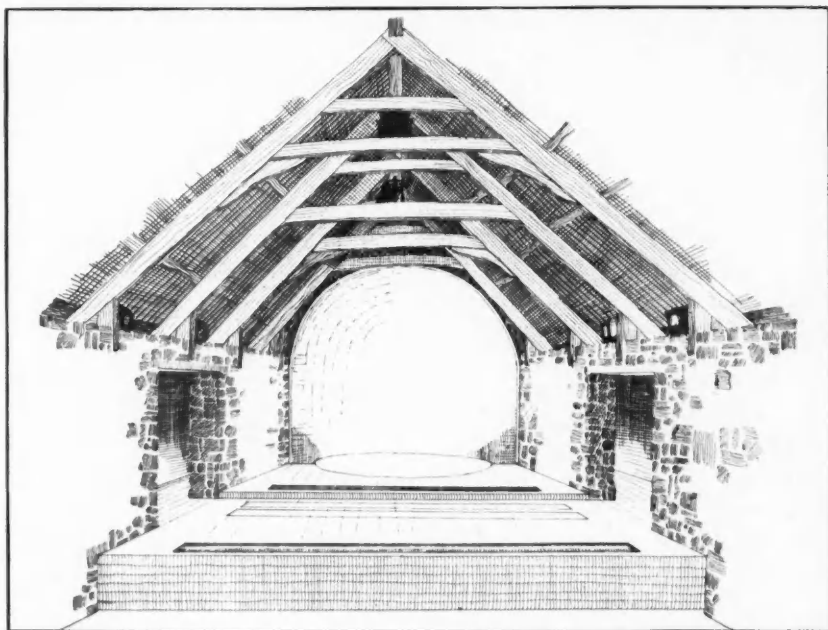
It will be seen from the sketch of the stage that there are only two entrances down stage, and when the whole forestage is used for an interior probably both of these would be filled in: Mr. Odlin in his design for "A Doll's House" overcame this difficulty very ingeniously by cutting off the O.P. corner from the front edge of the opening to about centre stage; making a platform to level up the stage and placed our flats on this, thus having a very interesting arrangement of the flats and an entrance behind this angled wall, as will be seen from the photo. I think it will be agreed that the result is unusual and pleasing.

It was most interesting when rehearsing both for this show and the previous one, to note that the dome of the cyclorama acted as a marvellous sounding board and carried all sounds right to the back of the auditorium as if there were loudspeakers there; but again, there was the difficulty sometimes of persuading the performers off-stage not to speak when under the dome as every word could be heard 'out front,' rather after the fashion of the Whispering Gallery in St. Paul's Cathedral.

The lighting of this stage has been approached with the idea of breaking away from the tradition of having the board in or near



A SCENE FROM "THE DOLL'S HOUSE" AS PRODUCED IN THE BARN THEATRE, DARTINGTON,
BY ELLEN VAN VOLKENBURG, MAY, 1934.



SKETCH OF THE BARN THEATRE, DARTINGTON, BY FRANK THORNTON-BASSETT.



S. I. HSIUNG'S "LADY PRECIOUS STREAM"
THE LAST SCENE. FROM AN ORIGINAL
CHINESE PAINTING.

A NEW BARN THEATRE

the Prompt Corner, in this case behind the wall on the right. The switchboard, a Strand Electric 18-way dimmer board, has been installed in a projection room at the other end of the auditorium above the foyer. It is hoped that the electrician working the board will follow the action of the play and all cues would then be visual, which obviates the anxiety of the S.M. wondering if the check will coincide with the switch, and again, the operator will be able to get any long check down or up to the very word, as he will be able to listen to the dialogue and can see the result of his efforts without the awful whisper, "Joe, your number two spot should be on now" coming from the P.C. There is telephone communication between the control room and the Corner and of course the usual cue lights and the S.M. has control of the revolve, which has a forward and reverse action and speed gear with an emergency hand mechanism in case the current fails. The Spots, all of 1,000 watt strength, are arranged in threes on certain beams beginning with the one directly in front of the cyclorama, which is known as No. 1 and they number up to 7, this beam being the last on which there is any light. There is a spot plug in the peak of the roof on beams Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7, and there are spots at the base of these beams on the thickness of the wall (which is about three feet!)

As will be seen in the sketch, there are two sections of rising floats, one in the usual position and the second is on the four inch rise in the stage; there has been provision for a further section of floats round the revolve, but these will probably never be used as they are too near the cyclorama to be of much use and so the plugs at each end are used as stage dips for the time being, together with the other six dips, two a side, and three in the centre of the revolve and four under the stage. In the first production the lighting of the dome was a great problem but after many experiments, it was found that one flood of 500 watt strength did the trick beautifully, without casting any shadows of the contour, in fact a very excellent result was achieved with an ordinary 40^w. house lamp. It is surprising how much light this quite small acting area needs, but one must remember that the throw from the peak of the barn is about twenty-five feet, the nearest, No. 1, having a downward throw of twenty feet,

so that most of the strength must come from the wall spots, as we call them. It will be seen from the photo of the opening scene of "The Doll's House" a pleasing arrangement of light was effected, and also how one is not conscious of the blotting out of the dome or the absence of a ceiling.

The auditorium has a steep rake and is planned to take 198 seats; there are two exits at the end and one half way down the left aisle which will eventually lead out to the round house, which is to be converted into a rehearsal and play reading room.

One cannot leave this very fascinating subject without stating the hope that all those who are near Totnes at any time will not fail to take a 'bus to Dartington and see for themselves this modern Utopia set in the heart of rural England.

GENEVA ENGLISH DRAMA SOCIETY.

The Geneva English Drama Society, which was founded in March 1933, has completed a successful first year under the presidency of Mr. John Palmer.

During the year the Society produced the following six plays: "See Naples and Die" by Elmer Rice, "I Lived With You" by Ivor Novello, "The Royal Family" by George Kaufman and Edna Ferber, "Alibi" by Michael Norton, "She Stoops to Conquer" by Oliver Goldsmith, and "When Crumple Played." The Society was represented at the International Institutions Art Exhibition by the production of "Christmas Presents" by Arthur Schnitzler. A popular attraction proved to be a series of readings, at which seventeen full-length plays and four short plays were read. Two of the plays read were by members of the Society.

The Society enjoys the advantage of an international membership. "The Royal Family" was acted by an all-American cast, and in other plays appropriate parts were filled by members of American, French, German, Swiss and even Albanian nationality.

The principal officers for the coming season are Mr. Chester Purves (President), Mr. Wilfrid Benson (Hon. Sec), and Mr. John Biller (Hon. Treas.).

SHERWOOD HALL CHILDREN'S MATINEE.

Performances by children have a freshness and charm which are generally accepted by indulgent audiences as fair exchange for the art and artifice of older actors. But the production we saw so far exceeded expectations as to temp tone to hyperbole—the pace and variation and comedy achieved in "The Swineherd" were remarkable. The performance of an adaptation of "Balder the Beautiful" was ambitious in conception and lovely in achievement. The sensitive interpretation in movement of deep emotions was extraordinary. Mention must be made of the very delightful costumes designed by Mm. Hermes and the effective settings and head-dresses designed and made by Mr. G. H. Savage-Cooper.

D. COATES.

SOME CONVENTIONS OF THE CHINESE STAGE

By S. I. Hsiung

G.B.S. told me, when he returned from China, that the most remarkable thing he noticed in a Chinese Theatre was the throwing and catching of bundles of steaming hot towels over hundreds of heads of the audience skillfully done by the ushers and attendants! This attack is sharp and true. I can offer no defence. And to a Western visitor, there are even more ridiculous things performed on the stage than that which was done in the pit and stalls.

In my Introduction to the play "Lady Precious Stream"* I wrote: "The conventional Chinese stage is not at all realistic. Apart from its lack of scenery, the indispensable Property Man is the greatest obstacle to realism. He is generally attired in his everyday habit and walks to and fro among fantastically costumed players. The reason why we do not require any stage director or prompter is perhaps simply because the Property Man is sure to place the chair properly when the player ought to sit down, and to provide a cushion when he or she ought to kneel. In the case when a hero is to die a heroic death, he can fall down majestically and steadily, for the never-failing hands of the Property Man are always on the watch and will promptly catch him before any disaster can take place. Nevertheless, this excellent master of ceremonies sometimes, in an excess of zeal, overdoes his duty by even looking after the personal wants and the worldly comforts of the players. For instance, when a player has some long lines to recite or has just finished one, he quietly presents to him or her a cup of tea to ease the throat. In hot weather, when the costume is rather thick, he fans the wearer incessantly. These actions would certainly be condemned by a Western audience, but we accept or rather pretend not to see them. There is, at least, this advantage. If some accidental mistake happens to the player or property, he can come forward and put it

right before the audience can decide whether it is part of the play or not, whereas on a Western Stage this would be impossible."

However, we must bear in mind that the present day Chinese stage, on which these queer things were performed, is at least a few hundred years the senior of the Elizabethan stage, if not as old as that of the Greeks. In poems of classical style, it would never do to use such words as "motor-car" and "radio," and on our stage how can any modern reformation be tolerated? Besides, each country has its own conventions. When I first saw the murdered man, after an enthusiastic encore, jump up from the spot where he was slain, bow repeatedly to the audience, and consent to be killed once more, I was more than surprised! Since the West has its encore, we must have our Property Man.

All the plays of this stage of ours are stock plays, and there are about three hundred of them. They were handed down from mouth to mouth for generations. Some educated actors have a manuscript of several seldom performed plays, but most of the experienced ones know all their plays by heart. Each player has, sometimes, his own version of some of his favourite plays which differs slightly from that of others. We rarely have rehearsals, so, when two players of different companies meet before the audience for the first time, they often find that circumstances have altered cases, and have to try their best to take the situation so as to "make both ends meet." Actors who cannot do something impromptu to meet the occasion are not considered talented players and will never be given important rôles.

Inexperienced boy actors are always given small parts, which, sad to relate, are not always suitable for their actual age. Thus we are liable to find many minor parts of old men are played by boys of nine or ten. Sometimes it is quite a relief to hear a very clear, childish voice coming out of a mouth covered with a lengthy white moustache and beard. The stock costume in any company's wardrobe is of medium measurement, and the poor child

* "Lady Precious Stream" by S. I. Hsiung, with a preface by Lascelles Abercrombie, with 3 illustrations in colour by Hsu Pei-Hung (Ju Peon), and 12 in monotone by Chiang Yee, to be published by Methuen on July 12th, 1934. Ordinary edition 8/6; limited de luxe edition on hand-made paper (100 copies) signed by the Author, £2 : 2 : 0.

SOME CONVENTIONS OF THE CHINESE THEATRE

has to roll up his sleeves and tuck up the hem of his majestic robe. In "Lady Precious Stream," the old General Mu is often played by a boy who has to be carried up to his seat by the Property Man. On the other hand, some important youthful rôles cannot be easily played by boys of suitable age, and many an elderly actor is highly praised when hopping and running and crying in the part of a cow-herd of seven or eight years of age.

Although we have had actresses ever since the T'ang Dynasty (A.D. 618-905), they are, strictly speaking, only "women companies." In these companies the actresses impersonate the man's part as well. In other words, we have not had, until recently, mixed companies of actors and actresses. It is quite possible to find, even now, in a performance, the man's part being played by an actress and the woman's part by an actor. Sometimes, when the enterprising management wants a little novelty, it will be arranged that a famous woman-impersonating actor is to play, contrary to his usual rule, the hero, whilst a famous actress, who has hitherto only impersonated men, is to play his lady-love. This would be considered an extraordinary attraction, and it would never fail to draw a full house, though to most of the connoisseurs, the acting of the actor would be regarded as too feminine and that of the actress, perhaps as a little too masculine. To many a critical eye, the part of a young heroine is much better portrayed by a wrinkled octogenarian actor than by a pretty actress of nineteen. They prefer "handsome is as handsome does" and care little for beauty that is only skin-deep!

The omission of scenery and property is another strange feature of our theatre. The unfurnished stage represents everything that is needed to make the play go. When the player is brandishing a whip, it means he is on horseback, and certain movements denote the actress is opening or shutting the door whilst other gestures tell us she is sewing or mending clothes. As the thread and needle in the player's hand cannot be discerned even by those who are in the first row of the orchestra stalls, why cannot the existence of a horse or a door be likewise suggested by mere gesture? This convention, which is sure to meet the approval of the economists of the West, was even praised by such a master-hand of dramatic technique as Sir James Barrie, who told me, when we happened to talk about the theatre

in his secluded Adelphi Terrace flat, that he was highly pleased with the stage directions of my plays. He said that he disliked the managers' bragging about how many thousands of pounds were spent in the production, and that one of his plays ("The Twelve-Pound Look") was produced at the expense of £5!

It seems that every one here in the West knows perfectly well that a Chinese play generally lasts three weeks or at least a fortnight. To remove this misunderstanding, I have to quote my Introduction again: It is "far from the truth, a Chinese play is no longer than a Western one, seldom longer than 'Strange Interlude,' and never longer than 'Back to Methuselah.' A stage performance in China, indeed, is longer than one here. It begins at six or seven in the evening and ends about midnight. But it is what we call here a 'triple bill' of eight or nine acts from an equal number of different plays. As no drop curtain is used, a Western visitor is liable to mistake the acting as of one continuous play."

The above are, I am afraid, some incurable conventions of our theatre, the history and development of which I have treated in detail in the first part of a book entitled "The Chinese Drama: Its History from Earliest Times until the Present, with a Study of the Influence of English Drama upon It," which is now in preparation for publication. The second part of this work deals entirely with the introduction of Shakespeare, the plays of the Nineties and that of the New Century to the Modern Chinese Stage, of which I hope I shall be able to give a brief summary some other time.

PLYMOUTH LITTLE THEATRE.

On May 10th, 11th and 12th, Mrs. Arthur Picken and her Company presented that delightful old comedy "The Beaux Stratagem" by Mr. Farquhar (1678-1707). It was played with great sparkle and vivacity, and charmingly dressed, especially by Mrs. Arthur Picken herself, who appeared in the rôle of the attractive Mrs. Sullen, and gave a delightful interpretation of the part, and by Mr. R. Grey as Archer—his admirable stage presence, and pleasant singing voice making his performance particularly effective. It seems strange that so few amateur companies attempt these brilliant old comedies, and we congratulate these players on their interesting and successful performance.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

INCORPORATING
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

President:
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council:
VISCOUNT ESHER

Secretary: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

Hon. Treasurer: ALEC REA.

MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 8, Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2.

Telephone: TEMPLE BAR 8507-8.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Annual General Meeting of the League was held at 8, Adelphi Terrace on Friday, June 29th. The main business, apart from the elections to the Council, was concerned with alterations in the Rules of the League with the object of permanently establishing the League's claim to be regarded as a non profit-making organisation. The changes involve a defined statement of the objects of the League and the creation of a body of three Trustees, who will be responsible for the assets of the League, and guarantee their application to the purposes of the League as defined in the Rules. In other words, legal safeguards have to be provided against the expenditure of revenue on any but the specific work of the League itself. By this means, our legal advisers inform us that the object in view should be legitimately attained. As usual, the Minutes of the Annual Meeting will be published in the October Number of "Drama"—the magazine not being published in August or September. In the meanwhile, the annual Summary of Receipts and Payments is being circulated to all members of the League together with the present issue.

The attention of readers of "Drama" is called to the advertisement appearing on the back of the cover dealing with the special Drama League Party which plans to visit the Moscow Theatre Festival from September 1-10. Already a good nucleus of members and friends have booked tickets, and those who are still hesitating are invited to communicate with the Secretary of the League without delay. A full Prospectus of the Tour will be sent free on application, and a glance at the interesting programme of plays to be presented nightly at the various Moscow theatres will sufficiently indicate the appeal of the Tour to all who are interested in the latest developments of Russian drama.

The result of the postal ballot for the five Provincial members of the League elected under Rule 7 (i) is as follows:—*Scotland*, Dr. C. Bernard Childs; *Wales*, Mr. D. Haydn Davies; *Northern Area*, Mr. B. L. Sutcliffe; *Eastern Area*, Mrs. Gordon Whitmore; *Western Area*, Mrs. Nesfield Cookson. The Council members nominated by the five Festival Committees are:—*Scotland*, Mr. D. Glen MacKemmie; *Wales*, Mrs. C. P. Williams; *Northern Area*, Mr. George O. Sharman; *Eastern Area*, Mr. Stuart Munro; *Western Area*, Mr. Bushill Matthews.

We congratulate Miss Elsie Fogerty on the honour that has recently been accorded to her in the award of the rank of Commander of the British Empire. As Principal and Founder of the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art, Miss Fogerty's work for the theatre is outstanding, and since the beginning, she has been one of the staunchest supporters of the Drama League.

The Drama League offices will be open throughout the holiday period, though the convenience of the Staff will be served if members of the League will withhold all but necessary enquiries during August. During the greater part of August the Library service will be suspended, and the Library itself will be closed for re-conditioning.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen Smith

"A Companion to Shakespeare Studies." Edited by H. Granville-Barker and G. B. Harrison. Cambridge. 12s. 6d.

"Famous Plays of 1933-34." Gollancz. 7s. 6d.
"End and Beginning." By John Masefield. Heinemann. 3s. 6d.

"Maurice Harte and A Stag at Bay." By T. C. Murray. Allen & Unwin. 3s. 6d.

"Margaret Gillan." By Brinsley MacNamara. Allen & Unwin. 3s. 6d.

"Squaring the Circle." By Valentin Kataev. Wishart & Co. 2s. 6d.

"Prize One-act Plays." Harrap. 2s. 6d.

"The Crowning Glory and Five Other One-Act Plays." By Ella Adkins. Harrap. 2s. 6d.

"Heard in Camera." By Essex Dane. Joseph Williams. 2s.

"Gas Masque." By Walter McLeod. Beverley Press. 1s.

"A Companion to Shakespeare Studies" might easily be a bewildering book, so vast, so complex has Shakespearean scholarship become, were it not for the fact that each writer has been at pains to deal clearly and simply with his subject; and also, no doubt, the care exercised by the editors to weld the book into a complete whole has been valuable. The result is a volume in which it would almost appear that every detail concerning Shakespeare has been analysed and discussed; his art, his poetry, his sources, his text, his life, the theatres and companies, the English spoken, the music, social background and drama of his time, as well as Shakespearean criticism, scholarship and theatrical production in general: dealt with by experts such as Dr. Harley Granville-Barker, Professor E. J. Dent, Dr. G. B. Harrison, Professor Bonamy Dobrée and many others. Of the various sections, "Shakespeare's Dramatic Art," "Shakespeare and Music," and "The Social Background" stand out as especially illuminating: the only one which is at all disappointing being "Shakespeare in the Theatre from the Restoration to the Present Time" which could have been longer and more detailed with advantage. It is inevitable that one result of this untiring research should be to show how far we are still from the heart of the Shakespearean mystery; indeed, a reader who, like the present writer, comes to the book fresh from a pilgrimage to Stratford, may be pardoned if Shakespeare possibly seems more real to him at the beginning than at the end, because, as one of the contributors pertinently says, "Shakespeare is not a document: he is a dramatist." This in no sense belittles the zeal, the learning, the immense care which distinguishes the volume; and, apart from the student, this "Companion to Shakespeare Studies" should be invaluable in helping the general reader to a more complete understanding and appreciation of the plays. But it might be wise to see as many of these plays as possible first.

"Famous Plays of 1933-34" is a notable addition to this excellent series. All six have had a definite measure of success, and, to judge from this alone, there can be no doubt as to the enormous improvement in the taste and intelligence of the modern playgoer. It is interesting to note that in five of the plays the

construction is of the slightest. Character and dialogue are all important, and are frequently of a subtlety which requires the highest professional skill to render convincing. This is especially the case with the amusing but none too pleasant "Reunion in Vienna"; it is also required to great extent in the remarkable "The Laughing Woman," a play in which the difficult task of presenting genius is triumphantly achieved. Much simpler is the delicate and moving "The Wind and the Rain"; a play which should be the making of many an amateur group in the future. Equally simple but more difficult is "Sixteen" which, like the somewhat feebler "The Distaff Side," presents a series of attractive characters whose emotions, however poignant, rarely break through the conventions of well-to-do life. "Clive of India" is the least interesting to read, depending as it does on the stir and bustle of a large cast and vigorous action. Perhaps the most astonishing thing about this play is that it was first produced by Dr. Peach's village players in Derbyshire.

When the Poet Laureate takes up the story of Mary Queen of Scots at its most tragic moment, one has a right to expect a grave and moving play; and this Mr. Masefield to some extent gives us in "End and Beginning," which deals first with the evening before and then the day of the Queen's execution. But the all-important character of Mary has none of the fine touches of psychology which mark the much earlier "Pompey the Great" for instance; she is often merely a distressed figure and her pious phrases, despite their finished melody, are very much the usual utterance of doomed figures in poetic drama. The most arresting pages are those in which a Spirit of Beauty speaks a strangely coloured monologue during the actual execution; while the final lines spoken by the Spirit of Mary breathe that note of exalted peace with which Mr. Masefield sometimes softens his tragedies. But one reader, at least, would have preferred less abstract beauty in favour of a more personal reaction to one of the most mysterious characters in history.

"Maurice Harte" and "A Stag at Bay" are two plays by Mr. T. C. Murray. Of the two the longer, "Maurice Harte," is the better. This study of a young candidate for the priesthood, driven to despair by the discovery that he has no vocation and forced back to Maynooth by his parents who have sacrificed all for him, only to return with mind and body broken just before his ordination, is a powerful one; although one would perhaps rather have seen more of Maurice, and so understood him better, than of his family, excellently drawn as they are. "A Stag at Bay" is an episode during a big strike; again the characters are clearly drawn but the two children are probably more satisfactory in print than they would be on the stage. Much less simple and direct but equally tragic is "Margaret Gillan" by Mr. Brinsley MacNamara. It is not always easy to follow the outline of the plot, and this story of a woman watching with baffled misery the man she really loved married to her daughter until, in a frenzy of agony at the daughter's death, she murders him, works up to its climax through detail which, though admirable, tends to confuse rather than help the general construction. The sinister Master Growney adds a

RECENT BOOKS

strongly macabre note to an already sufficiently unpleasant tragedy of Irish middle-class life. "Squaring the Circle," a comedy by Valentin Kataev, translated by N. Goid-Verschoyle, shows a Soviet dramatist in what is, at least to most of us, a new mood—that of laughing at his own institutions. The matrimonial tangles of two couples living in one room divided by a chalk line are exploited amusingly enough, although the joke is a thin one for three acts, however short. But most of the dialogue is good, and in any case it is a welcome change to see that even Russia can laugh at some of her highly uncomfortable experiments.

The one-act plays on the list are of a better quality than usual, and the three plays chosen as the best in the recent competition organised by the International One-Act Play Theatre should prove acceptable to amateurs, especially as all three are tragic, and at the moment the amateur appears instinctively drawn to as much gloom and misery as possible. The first, Miss Mary Plowman's "Get Out of Your Cage" is a play for six women, taking place in the staff room of a girl's school. The situation is unforced and not without humour, the characterization excellent, and the end convincing. In the other two plays the writers seem determined to harrow our feelings at all cost. In "Jane Wogan," by Miss Florence Howell, it is difficult not to feel that a little human sympathy on the part of Jane for her husband might have managed a comparatively happy ending without detriment to

a well-constructed play, and to the probable relief of the audience; and in "Drought," by Miss M. S. Armstrong, some of the passages are marred by too melodramatic a touch. Nevertheless, this tiny tragedy of New South Wales, with only two characters and a stirring climax should, with some producers, prove extremely effective. "The Crowning Glory and five other one-act plays" will be useful for producers and actors of limited experience. None of the plays last for more than fifteen or twenty minutes and neatness of workmanship is their main characteristic; each theme being given an ingenious twist before the curtain falls. "Heard in Camera" is an exciting drama for seven women. Immediately after a criminal enquiry which has ended inconclusively a redoubtable woman lawyer (may the type never increase!) cross-examines a woman who has come triumphantly out of the public ordeal until the very melodramatic truth is reached. Love, jealousy and strange Chinese drugs play their accustomed part, but although the material is not very original, the play has genuine tension and can be guaranteed not to bore the audience while it is in progress. "Gas Masque" is another anti-war play by Mr. Walter McLeod, this time a comedy—and the efforts of the militant Mrs. Wimple to prepare for a future gas attack on the village of Little Puddlecombe provide the author with good material for his perfectly sincere attack on the Wimples of the world in general.

BOY PLAYERS IN "KING LEAR"

By Guy Boas

"King Lear" was presented by the boys of Cranleigh School at the end of June, and this article by the Headmaster of Sloane School, Chelsea, has been written as the result of a similar experiment conducted with equal success earlier in the year.

HAVING produced a number of Shakespeare's plays during the last few years with school-boy players, and on the last occasion "King Lear," I have been set wondering why "Lear" is acted so comparatively seldom. I put the question to a highly experienced and distinguished Shakespearean producer and actor, who answered frankly "Because there is no money in it." When one reflects on the almost unrelieved gloom of the play, the number of parts of first rate importance which have to be filled (and paid for), together with the difficulty of finding a professional actor capable of acting Lear, not afraid to do so, and who is also a sufficient public "draw," one sees the substance in this view. Yet one questions whether it quite does justice to the public or to the magnificence of the play. Might not the public (which is not such a fool as it is supposed to be) support a pro-

fessional production of "Lear" if the actors set about their task differently? Personally I found "King Lear," under the conditions in which we are able to present Shakespeare, more abundantly rewarding to produce even than "Hamlet": the grip that it maintained every evening on the audience was paramount. Yet I have never come away from any professional production of the play without disappointment; either the performance was flat or "full of sound and fury signifying nothing." (I admit that I missed seeing the Lear of Mr. John Gielgud: nor do I know whether Mr. Frank Cellier has acted the part: these are two actors who do know the secret of Shakespeare).

I suggest that "Lear" is likely to suffer even more fatally than other plays of Shakespeare from the inability or refusal of so many actors at the present time

BOY PLAYERS IN "KING LEAR"

to speak poetry as poetry. Mr. Granville-Barker writes "When a dramatist has set himself a task to tax all his resources we may look for him to fortify himself within his theatre's strongest convention. So it is, at any rate, with the third act of "King Lear." The chief strength of Elizabethan stage-craft lay in its comprehensive use of poetry." This being so, it is little wonder that a generation of actors who for the most part—with a few honourable exceptions—speak Shakespeare's incomparable poetry as though it were twentieth century prose, stand little chance of making a success of "Lear." Moreover many of those actors who do speak Shakespeare as poetry seem unaware *what* poetry it is! The best of them almost invariably try to force things ("pressing" golfers would call it) by interpolating themselves between Shakespeare and the audience with tricks and over-emphasis of voice and gesture. This has been often noticeable as far as voice is concerned in the recent broadcasts of Shakespeare by the B.B.C. If only the players would trust to Shakespeare's poetry to do the work, what a much more satisfying effect would they produce. Shakespeare's poetry is too great to admit competition: and actors, and still more actresses (for whom the plays were not written), who set up their personalities, let alone their mannerisms, in competition with Shakespearean verse, will not win. If someone like the late Professor Raleigh with a sincere and acute feeling for the *poetry* of Shakespeare, leaving aside for the time the drama, could read the play over with the professional cast before they started rehearsing and could communicate the magic loveliness of Shakespeare's muse to them, and if only then were they allowed to start acting, what spell-binding performances might we have, instead of so many of the flat, personally-minded productions which the West End usually offer us as Shakespeare, and which, for all their brilliant scenic effects, are without real sincerity of soul.

Amateur boy players, properly trained, with no temptation or opportunity to exploit their personalities, can give so easily and readily what adult professionals as a rule cannot, or will not give—Shakespeare's verse spoken with the genuine ring, and thrill, and magic in it, that one is reminded that after all the plays were written to be performed in considerable measure by boys: English poetic

drama in fact died with the disappearance of the boy-actor. Is it possible that as Shakespeare, who was a singularly competent and astute person, wrote his plays so as to be suitable for boys to act, boys under discipline are the players who are capable of acting them most suitably? With their obvious additional advantages one would have thought that adult professionals could do better than boys, and I am quite ready to believe it as soon as I have heard them do it. But up to date—and I say this with no prejudice or affectation—I have not. "Out of the mouths of babes . . ."

PERFORMANCE OF PRIZE ONE-ACT PLAYS

INTERNATIONAL ONE-ACT PLAY THEATRE COMPETITION.

THE International One-Act Play Theatre Competition for original one-act plays by new authors, reached an interesting conclusion at the St. Martin's Theatre on June 3rd, when three plays, selected from over 350 entries, were admirably presented by a professional company.

An interesting feature of the performance was that the judges—Messrs. W. A. Darlington, Hubert Griffith, C. B. Purdom and J. W. Marriott—who had previously read the plays in manuscript, delayed their decision on the final awards until the curtain had been rung down on the last play.

"Drought" by M. S. Armstrong opened the programme and, although possessed of a powerful theme, it was found to lack the effectiveness in actual presentation which had seemed so promising in manuscript form.

"Get Out of Your Cage," by Mary Plowman was a realistic episode in the Staff Room of an up-to-date School for Girls: its characters were well drawn but the dialogue—though humorous—was lacking in the action so essential to a really well written play.

Florence Howell's "Jane Wogan," was the final item on the programme. Its story was widely improbable but of undoubted dramatic power, with character delineation of a very high order. It says much for this new dramatist that one could be almost convinced of the truth of her story by its vivid characterisation.

Mr. Hubert Griffith, in his summing-up at the end of the performance, explained that the judges had been faced with a quandary in awarding the first prize, and had deliberated for some time over "Get Out of Your Cage" and "Jane Wogan," but had eventually decided to award the prize to the author if the last named, as the judges felt that Miss Howell was the more likely of the competing authors to write a better play in the future.

Every congratulation is due to Miss Florence Waller and Miss Elizabeth Everard, the directors of the International One-Act Play Theatre, not only for the enterprise they have shown in inaugurating so interesting a competition, but in their endeavour to restore the one-act play to the professional theatre.

PRIVATE HOUSE THEATRES

FROM July 2nd to July 7th, Ludlow Castle is once more to see "Comus." Three hundred years ago the masque written by the twenty-six year old Milton was presented in the Banqueting Hall of the Castle, then under the Earl of Bridgewater round whose daughter the adventures of the poem are said to revolve.

This year the masque is to be given as a tercentenary celebration of the original "Comus" and as the climax of a historical pageant of Shakespeare. Other episodes are to include the surrender of Caractacus to the Romans, the translation of St. Milburga's relics to Much Wenlock Abbey, and the tragic leave taking of Edward V. He is to be shown as a slim, bewildered boy of twelve, saddened by the death of his father, mystified by the air of intrigue all around, but with no foreboding of the fate that ended his own journey. Philip Sidney too is to be shown as a boy in Ludlow Castle, for his father lived there while Lord President of the Council of Wales; but for most of us who love the theatre, it is the revival of "Comus" and all that it stands for that makes a visit to Ludlow essential.

For here is the theatre of private enterprise, the theatre not necessarily of amateur actors but of independent organisation, the play written by one of the household and acted in a non-commercial theatre before an audience at once appreciative and intelligent; in fact the very atmosphere that so many amateur societies are striving to achieve to-day.

It is rather amusing to trace back for a moment the private house theatre as distinct from the guild theatre, travelling players, or even the early theatre run for profit. In modern Europe, the leaders of the movement were of course the great houses of Italy, those of Mantua and Ferrara having theatres of their own at the end of the fifteenth century. Miss Winifred Smith in her admirable "Italian Actors of the Renaissance" translates Isabella d'Este's account of the private theatre of Ferrara when Alfonso d'Este, her brother, was married to Lucrezia Borgia in 1502. Ceiling, walls, dais and floor were covered in red, green and scarlet; women sat admiring in the centre of the great square hall, the men grouped round them at the sides; in all an auditorium of five thousand, including both guests and the people of Ferrara.

Alfonso, however, was not the man to let

his father's splendour daunt his own enterprise and eighteen years later he had converted not an immense hall, but a whole island into a theatre. No charm was forgotten, no expense spared. Fountains, woods, gardens, wild and tame animals, vineyards, "all imaginable pleasures" made a background for the plays; only one detail was forgotten, the plays themselves were not suitable to the background or the audience and the guests were bored rather than entertained.

As the sixteenth century progressed, however, plays improved and the rather charming habit of each great man keeping his own staff of actors and actresses continued (actresses arrived early in Italy), but during the latter half of the seventeenth century concentration was rather on splendour of scenery than individual patronage; one has only to read Pepys to discover what strange and curious devices were indulged in all over Europe. Perhaps as a reaction, the eighteenth century discovered the pastoral garden-stage such as the Florentine one, illustrated in our photograph. These garden stages were small and sedate and very suitable for light mock pastorals and operas of the Magic Flute type. With the romantic movement, however, these stages again were given up for the gardens had to be "naturalistic," all formality being swept away in the "Landscape" movement of the nineteenth century. Since then the outdoor stage was hardly known until the twentieth century revival.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD.

THE GREEK PLAY AT BRADFIELD COLLEGE.

The Agamemnon of Æschylus, played by the boys of Bradfield College this year was a beautiful and moving performance, worthy of the best traditions of their Greek Theatre. Though the number of boys who take Greek at this school is now so reduced that the play can no longer be considered as the natural outcome of the general work of the School, it remains an important part of its life, and many boys, other than the Greek scholars, come within the influence of its austere beauty in the characters of warriors, slaves and attendants. The production showed infinite care, and a reverence for the drama, in the grace and dignity of the poses, the rhythm of voice and body, and in the wise restraint of the women's gesture. The conventionalised fight at the end was a fine piece of decoration, as was also the procession of the return of Agamemnon. The singing, movement and general bearing of the Chorus was fitting and well harmonised with the drama. The acting of the protagonists was particularly interesting, in that the producer had given an effect of masks, without actually using them.



A GARDEN THEATRE IN FLORENCE

This Theatre is at a Villa two miles out on the Bologna road. An interesting feature is the prompter's box hidden by a tuft of green in the middle. Footlights were used and hidden by a small hedge of box. Clipped yew forms the wings.



Photo Pollard Cronther

THE CHORUS IN "THE ROCK"
BY T. S. ELIOT, AS RECENTLY
PRODUCED AT SADLER'S WELLS
THEATRE BY E. MARTIN BROWNE.

VILLAGE PLAY-WRITING COMPETITION, 1932

REPORT OF THE ADJUDICATORS

By Penelope Wheeler and Dr. Gordon Bottomley

THE judges in this competition are pleased to note that the interest in it, as manifest in the number of entries, is maintained and extended; and that the quality of the plays sent in is encouragingly adequate. Ten years ago there were too many writers obviously interested in the novel problems presented by the acclimatisation of drama in the villages who, nevertheless, had not thought enough about the fundamentals of the art of drama. During this ten years the number of submitted plays that could not possibly be performed has diminished. This kind of play is not extinct, but by now it is the exception.

There is still, however, a limitation often manifest: we still receive a substantial number of plays with admirably written dialogue which cannot be premiated or recommended for use on account of their lack of development and design. They remain conversations: the conversations often seem to be between persons adequately (and even well) characterised; but it is static character; the authors have not noticed that the reactions of characters on each other produce change and growth and movement, and give shape to a plot.

This fault is particularly noticeable in dialect plays. The percentage of first-rate writing in dialect plays is very high; a live dialect is so rich in colour and expressiveness that it can give an effect of quite vivid, first-hand characterisation even when that is not the writer's strong point. This creates a permanent problem for the judges; racy dialect can make a weak play seem better, on a first reading, than it is—but in the end that advantage seems to be a snare to many competitors, it conceals from them that conversation is not a purpose in itself, and that the aspect of vigorous, strong-flavoured life which it lends is no substitute for that spirit of life which ought to begin in a root and end in a flower.

In the last year or two another weakness has developed in our writers. In an age when *The Thriller* is the only live form of romantic writing—and most especially on the stage—it was not to be expected that they should escape the germ. The judges hasten to add that they do not say this with any heightening of the eye-brows to make them higher: there is a place for *The Thriller* in amateur drama, and a chance to improve substantially on the commercial article. In drama, however, the need for some measure of vital characterisation is quickly more apparent than it appears to be to the average reader of crook novels; and playwrights need to be much more wary that they are as to the uses and limitations of violence.

Nothing is so easy as to make a sensational effort on paper by driving one's pen to habitual extremes: probably nothing gives so much satisfaction to the beginner as "strong" writing. When this is translated into terms of performance we find it means shouting at the top of the voice and exercising the body vigorously, and keeping it up all the time: everything is emphasised, all the expressiveness that lies in contrast is lost. It should be remembered, too, that pistol-shots

happen so suddenly as to be insignificant and ineffective unless their violent incursion on the ear comes as a contrast; they need to be led up to, and it is their effect that gives them their effectiveness. There is real success awaiting the crook-playwright who applies the methods of Jane Austen and Tchekov to his sensational material; but first and foremost he will have to learn that lasting success does not come by providing sufficient sensational material, but only by understanding the economic use of it.

In CLASS I: TRANSLATION FROM ANY EUROPEAN LANGUAGE: a Prize and a Recommendation for Publication are awarded to "*The Guédonec Sisters*," translated from the French of Jean Jacques Bernard by 'Jane Dare.' It is a delicate and unusual piece of work, searching deep places in the uneventful lives of simple people, and in the process offering—in terms of every-day realism—as many opportunities for creative imagination and symbolic insight as players and producer know how to take: and the Breton setting would be a useful exercise in suggesting a foreign atmosphere by simples and ordinary means.

"*A Way with Surly Husbands*," translated from the German of Hans Sachs by 'Haro' receives an Honourable Mention with a Recommendation for Publication. This play is well in line with previous successful entries of this nature, though not in itself one of the most interesting of the series: it offers good theatrical opportunities on the way to its rather too easy ending, and the translation deserves special praise for the way it renders verse into verse naturally and engagingly, in a manner that approaches the ideal for this class of work.

A translation of Rostand's "*The Two Pierrots*," or "*The White Supper*" by 'Farmeress' and a modernisation of "*Gammer Gurton's Needle*" by 'Orthia' have also been entered in this class. Numerous recent performances of the latter have not shown any crying need for its modernisation; and in any case it is doubtful if the result qualifies as a translation. The two pieces are mentioned together here as being both in rhymed verse, and failing by awkward and inept handling of the rhyme. An opportunity has been lost here, for rhymed verse can be an excellent discipline in both diction and production; but it needs more understanding of the nuances of metre, and for lack of this the version of "*Gammer Gurton's Needle*" is sometimes more difficult than the original.

In CLASS II: ONE-ACT COMEDY: a prize and a recommendation for publication are awarded to "*The Wild Crabs*," by 'Dolly Pentreath.' This play is avowedly based on Spanish material, and there might have been an advantage in placing it in its original setting: the local colour would have been an attraction—as well as an incitement to get away from the prosaic literalism to which amateur producers are so often prone. But it stands transplantation to a Cornish *milieu* very well; and a well-managed dialect has not prevented a good and well-balanced development of the theme.

VILLAGE PLAY-WRITING COMPETITION

It is an excellent little play, really alive and stirring, and should appeal to many societies.

"Up against Mrs. Cooper," by 'Saxon,' and "Pound Foolish," by 'Oberon,' are awarded Honourable Mention with a Recommendation for Publication. In the former there is a good sense of the stage, with good character-drawing, and brisk, well-managed dialogue working up to real drama and ironic comedy in the scene between the two girls. "Pound Foolish" has a good sense of comedy, and an excellent central scene of husband-catching which is an authentic shot at one of the classic situations of comedy.

In this Class "Luck," a play written for broadcasting, deserves a word of praise for both dialogue and situations. It has quality throughout, but it is too slight for entry in this class, and needs amplification for visual performance before it can enter into serious competition with the best plays in this section. For that it is also disqualified by the authors' names being appended to it.

Two plays with no indication of authorship, "Mary's Black Eye" and "All I T Family" deserve mention and censure for the discourtesy involved in asking anyone to handle and consider such indescribably dirty, slovenly scripts.

In CLASS III: ONE-ACT SERIOUS PLAY: a Prize and Recommendation to Print are awarded to "Jonathan's Day," by 'Autolycus.' This is a remarkable and outstanding piece of work, a tragic and most moving echo of the war. There is power and a fine delicate feeling in it everywhere—and, most outstanding of all, a noble simplicity. The psychological surprises of the last scene are finely invented, and the old woman's (mother of the dead soldier) reactions, in particular, are beautifully done and most touching. There can be no doubt of the fundamental quality of this play: but we feel bound to add that the earlier part moves awkwardly and is not handled expertly, as the ending is. The story seems to be one that was bound to have leaked out earlier, and could be made more credible with advantage.

"The Fugitive," by 'Freedom,' receives Honourable Mention and a Recommendation for Publication. The organisers and judges have noted with pleasure this year a number of entries from New Zealand of a promising and interesting character, and suggesting an endemic development of drama with attractive likenesses to and differences from English drama.

"Men for Pieces," by 'Kismet'; "The Koekoea Calls," by 'Martha'; and "The Dress," by 'Dressmaker' receive Honourable Mention. The first (also from New Zealand) has some fine qualities, the returned man is touchingly depicted and the play lends itself to acting with sincerity and emotion; but there is something of bathos in the end, and a vagueness earlier, that call for more consideration. "The Koekoea Calls" is a play of originality and promise, and is distinguished by a fine and delicate feeling and insight which the author as yet lacks the technical skill to develop fully: the opening is admirable, but in the later stages the play moves awkwardly and loses grip. Its author has undoubtedly the creative imagination, and more experience could make this play a fine one. "The Dress" is in many ways an impressive effort: it is harsh and probing and pitiless in the way that life can be, and it only fails of complete success because it etches its themes in deep lines without the requisite light and shade and contrast.

In CLASS IV: ONE-ACT ROMANTIC OR POETIC PLAY: no prize is awarded. Romance as a category or art is looked down on nowadays. It has

its devotees and its faithful, but they pursue it in a dispirited and discouraged fashion, as though believing there is no welcome for them: while those who would encourage them (including the judges in this competition) are usually prevented by the half-hearted and ill-judged ways in which they set about their work: the standard of technical skill and creative insight is lower in this Class than in any other section of this competition. An Honourable Mention and a Recommendation for Publication are awarded to "The Unwanted" by 'Colbury' and "At the Half-Moon Inn" by 'Tom Cobley.' The former is the most interesting play in the class—and, in intention, one of the most interesting in the whole competition. The other play commended is a specimen of the 18th century Highwayman plus Dolly Varden effort which is never absent from any playwrighting competition. In this one they come to life, unexpectedly.

In CLASS V: FULL LENGTH PLAY, there is no entry of sufficiently outstanding quality and definite achievement to receive a prize. "Speed the Plough," by 'Nameless' is awarded Honourable Mention and a Recommendation for Publication. A second recommendation is, however, appended as a rider—for revision and curtailment before publication. This piece is to be regarded as a framework for the numerous folk-songs it introduces: it can be made into an agreeable and picturesque entertainment by careful production, but the songs are nearly all too long, and sufficient provision is not made for the disposition and use of the silent characters while the singer performs.

An Honourable Mention is awarded to "The Angel Inn": 'Anonymous'. Here the perennial highwayman appears again in his fullest bloom.

The best work in this section is put into a play that cannot receive the commendation its writer's promise should earn—"The Fortune Hunter's Fate," by 'Ann Carstairs.' Each of its three acts has interest and shews ability: but it is unfortunate that the main characters suffer inexplicable changes in the intervals, and turn up as quite different (and consequently unintelligible) people in the next act.

In addition to the above awards the judges single out "Jonathan's Day" by 'Autolycus' (Class III) as the best play in the whole competition, with the special claim to publication which this gives (subject to the criticism passed upon it in its class).

Once again I have to thank Mrs. Penelope Wheeler and Dr. Gordon Bottomley for their very great kindness in judging this competition. It is extremely good of such busy people to give us their time and the benefit of their genius and experience. 191 plays were entered this year. A small number of these were, as usual, unsuitable for village work. While village players are, in the hands of competent producers, capable of attempting drama which covers a very wide range, provided that it is sincerely written and based on true human experience, they do not appear at their best in highly introspective plays, nor in those which consist of nothing but sophistication; neither can they very generally understand characters which have no real existence apart from urban conditions. Particulars of the next Competition will be found in the advertisement pages.

JANET SCRUTTON,
Hon. Sec., Playwriting Competition.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE GROUP THEATRE OF LONDON.

THE Group Theatre is an attempt to put into practice a number of ideas which many people accept but do not know how to tackle. As is usual with new movements, it is the way of achieving the end rather than the end itself which is criticised, and because of this the Group Theatre has come before the public only as it has gradually felt strong enough to face the inevitable barrage of conventional criticism.

The Group Theatre wants to see a permanent company of players under their own director, trained together in the same style so that they have complete command of their voices and bodies, working on plays (often in verse) written for them by their own authors on contemporary themes—that is, on subjects which matter profoundly to us now.

These ideas may sound very novel, except to students of theorists like Craig, Stanislavsky, or Copeau. But, taken in perspective, they are not really so new. Our theatrical standards in England are set by the West End theatre; but the West End is a new phenomenon itself in the history of the stage: so new that people still active (like Dame Madge Kendall) can remember when it didn't exist. Its birth may be dated from the repeal of the Patents Laws in 1843; before this there were only two theatres in London. They enjoyed a monopoly, played a classic repertory of old and new plays with no long runs, and a permanent company continued for years without radical change, unified by common training and experience, and under the influence of a very strong tradition.

In less than a hundred years the two theatres have become fifty; permanent companies have vanished; runs of months and years are the aim of every production; and tradition has given place to traditions: in each company you see traces of the romanticism of Irving, the comedy of manners, the music-hall, true-to-life realism, and continental expressionism. This is fatal, because in a co-operative art like the theatre you must have unity of style.

The Group Theatre wishes to perfect a theatrical unity of style within itself, and to place itself in the true line of theatrical development. It wants far more than the repertory theatre which changes its company every season and puts on a fresh play every week. Good work takes time and cannot be hurried; training takes years; and when experiments are being made, they must not be on a scale where a few mistakes will ruin everything because they cost so much money.

In the theatre, as elsewhere, you must walk before you can run. So, when the Group Theatre began, two years ago, it asked its members to work with it between commercial engagements, and to pay 6d. a week. In the summer of 1932, a few members were able to go away together and work for a fortnight. In the following summer this was repeated on a much larger scale, and performances were given in villages and small towns.

Meanwhile, regular classes had been started in London; and although they were held at first under very uncomfortable conditions in hired rooms, they grew until the Group Theatre was able to take its own premises in Great Newport Street. The Group Theatre chooses its plays strictly according to the increasing technical and emotional scope of its still very young members. Because of this, it began with early English plays which had great simplicity and directness of style

until it was at last able to give a play written, produced, acted, with music composed, dresses designed and made, and staged entirely by members of the Group Theatre: "The Dance of Death" by W. H. Auden, given in February last at the Westminster Theatre.

This was the end of the first phase of the Group Theatre's development. Having evolved its method and tested it by more than two years work in London with a large body of volunteers, it is now preparing to establish a permanent company by sending 20 actors to the country to train for six months and prepare three plays which will then be shown in London. In the country it is cheaper to live, and the distractions of town life, which make concentrated study impossible, are avoided. The Group Theatre is at present engaged in raising the £500 which are necessary to support the company during this time: those who are interested may help by becoming members (this costs one guinea a year) or by sending a donation to the Hon. Treasurer, the Group Theatre, 9, Great Newport Street, London, W. C. 2.

RAMSEY DRAMATIC SOCIETY, ISLE OF MAN.

Here, in a small town of some four thousand inhabitants, there has long been a dramatic society. This entered on a new lease of life in 1922, from which year dates a connection with the Village Drama Society, and later with the British Drama League. Their wardrobes and libraries have often helped us and inspiration has reached us through the visits of one of our number to their Vacation Courses. We have read "Drama" without making it aware of us, hence a retrospective first contribution.

The Society numbers about forty men and women and the only special privilege attached to the payment of the 2s. subscription is the right to be considered for a part. The general idea is to have one play-reading, one social and one public performance in the autumn session and again in the spring term. The Society's policy is not adventurous but definite improvement can be seen among those who have remained acting members since 1922, and at least half-a-dozen members have tried their hand at producing seriously, while more have found an outlet for their humour and high spirits in arranging original items for the socials.

The hall in which public performances are given is lit by gas and acoustically leaves much to be desired, but it has a stage which lends itself to extension fore and aft, and it will seat an audience of four hundred. This spring a rummage sale raised £17 as a first contribution to a fund for acquiring a Hall of our own.

Looking back, one remembers presentations of "The Admirable Crichton," "You Never Can Tell," "It Pays to Advertise," "The School for Scandal," "Yellow Sands," "The Romantic Young Lady," "Saint Joan," "The Immortal Lady," "The Ghost Train," and "Are You a Mason?" Alternately, groups of one-act plays have been given and last month the bill was "The Road of Poplars," "To-day of All Days," and "Count Albany."

These one-act plays often tour not only the immediate country-side, but the whole Island in answer to requests for an evening's programme from this Wesley Guild or that Church Society. Very popular are short plays by insular authors or those 'translated' into the hybrid dialect which is far removed from the real Manx, a Gaelic language not now understood by the people.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

"Mr. Samson," as "Mr. Quilliam" proved a great success in this form.

Last year saw considerable dramatic activity in Douglas, from which emerged an Insular Federation of Dramatic Societies. Further, a competition for one-act plays was run for the first time as a new class in the Manx Music Festival, then in its forty-second year. Mr. Sladen-Smith adjudicated and we took first place with "Mr. Quilliam" and third with "On Dartmoor." This year we have entered "To-day of All Days" and "Count Albany" to be judged by Mr. Wm. Armstrong.

That is still in the future as are other developments, one of which we hope will be a Vacation School run by the British Drama League in this beautiful holiday island.

L. E. W.

THE KENNETH SPOONER DRAMATIC SOCIETY, PLYMOUTH.

A FEW years ago, Mr. Spooner began presenting Plymouth with a series of comedies, farce and "thrillers." Each play ran for a week, each with increasing success; for, though they were plays of mixed literary merit, they were full of excitement and were played with absolute conviction, however unlikely the theme. These performances had pace, attack, stability; the acting was admirable.

Then, greatly daring, Mr. Spooner obtained permission to do "The Rose Without A Thorn" this March: thus staging the first performance of this play to be given in the West.

A beautiful play, requiring the portrayal of famous people, it is full of difficulties for amateurs—and is utterly unlike anything this Company, as a whole, has ever tackled before; it was produced by a young member of the Plymouth Repertory Theatre (professional): it was his first production—and he had not seen the play! The only "outside help" the Society can be said to have had was from the costumes, supplied by H. & M. Rayne—who had dressed the original London production.

Summoned from London to see the show, never have I been so impressed by an amateur production; had I see dozens. The production was simple and sincere: the settings in perfect harmony, the lighting charming; the whole presentation convincing, accurate and professionally "smooth." And these actors get behind their parts; they don't stand in front of them! They act with their brains, as well as with their faces; and they have that rare gift—attack. Most of them have that rarer gift—the power to hold a pause; and the happy knack of seeming entirely un-selfconscious.

All the parts were very suitably cast. "Henry VIII" carried this exacting and varied part with dignity and ease. "Katheryn" was a sweet, young and lovely queen. The "Archbishop" was reliable and calm—most ecclesiastical! His very quietness, in the Prison Scene, was strangely moving.

The Masque and the Interlude did not let the play drop—as so often happens with these interpolated fragments; each had its proper value and its proper effect.

"OEDIPUS" IN SCOTLAND.

A notable achievement was obtained by the senior pupils of Airdrie Academy, Lanarkshire, when they staged "Oedipus King of Thebes" in Professor Murray's

translation on May 4th and 5th, in the Sir John Wilson Town Hall, Airdrie. The pupils had the assistance of their music master Mr. Midgley, who composed the music for the choruses and trained the boy singers themselves. The Art Master, Mr. George C. Stevenson painted the pillared façade of a Greek Palace on sky-blue paper for a background. The pupils paper-makers, Messrs. R. Craig & Sons, Caldercruix, made a gift of all the paper required. The pupils admirably responded to the call made upon them. Most of the actors were drawn from the Classical Department. Peter Brodie, the boy who took the part of Oedipus was particularly good though all the other principal characters were equally well chosen and almost as effective. Mary Henderson as Queen Jocasta was a decided success and made a handsome picture with her five maids of honour. The caste was composed of 56 pupils all at present in attendance at the School. All the dresses were made in school or improvised from bed coverlets and bed sheets kindly lent by the parents. The dresses were true to type and showed the gracefulness of the Dorian mantle and the Athenian peplos as well as the elegance and beauty of the Phrygian innovations. The play was witnessed by the Professor of Greek in Glasgow University and the Rectors and teachers of several schools in Glasgow and the neighbourhood, all of whom were profuse in offering their congratulations. The productions were run on behalf of the Airdrie Mental Welfare Association for Children, and that Association has received a handsome donation from the proceeds after all expenses have been paid.

JOHN ANDERSON, M.A., B.A., B.Sc.,
Rector of Airdrie Academy.

WELWYN DRAMA FESTIVAL.

Mr. Sladen-Smith's well reasoned adjudication, and the British Drama League School at Digswell Park, did much to sustain interest in the Welwyn Drama Festival. There is no doubt, however, that the "week" has a firm hold locally where it is one of the year's events.

Of the twenty-five plays performed seventeen were new. The most striking was Mr. Sydney Box's "Not This Man" which carried off the New Play Prize. This piece has a cast of 15 men and 1 woman, and concerns an Indian's invitation to 12 potential "Disciples" to lunch with him. The visitors express their creeds and in the end one of them "crucifies" the Easterner by shooting him. The play was performed by the Welwyn Thelians who won the second prize for performances.

The Clifton Arts and Bristol Drama Club were awarded the Welwyn Trophy (presented by Dr. Gray) for the best performance. They appeared in Cyril Robert's new play "Tails Up" a fantastic peep into the future. The play did not do well under "dramatic endeavour" but won on acting, production and presentation.

Third place went to the Harpenden Group of the British Drama League for a performance of "One Goes Alone" with which they reached the Eastern Area Final.

Thus all three prizes (as is usual) went to affiliated Societies of the British Drama League. The standard of acting and production showed a definite improvement, and the new curtains considerably helped the stage settings.

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STOP PRESS! The costumes of the Ballet for Mr. Sidney Carroll's production of "COMUS" at the Open-air Theatre, Regents Park, were by **DOREEN ERROLL** (see display advertisement page IV).

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Abbreviations:-

(c) comedy
(d) drama
(f) farce
Cs. costume
** Prize-winning play.
(v) in vol. with other plays.

Char. characters (M—male; F—female).
In. interior scene.
Ex. exterior scene.
(o) suitable for outdoor presentation.
† suitable for Village Drama Societies.

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Intending competitors are particularly requested to note the following points. The kind of play we want must be suitable for country players and audiences. These people have, in most cases, had a good deal of dramatic experience, and must not be written down to. But they need a special type of play.

The plays must be actable on small stages and in small halls, without a great deal of expense or elaborate mechanism. Modern highly sophisticated scenes, night clubs, bridge parties, &c. are not useful, nor are characters such as Cabinet Ministers and Bright Young Things. We want good human stories, embodying real ideas. Plays that are merely conversations, or just slight episodes, have been overdone, and the country players are everywhere demanding plays of real dramatic value.

CLASS I. Translation of a play or plays in any European language which are suitable for village production. The suitability of the play will be taken into consideration as well as the translation, and free adaptation in some cases will be necessary. Copyright must not be infringed.

CLASS II. One-act comedy for village players (to play not longer than 40 minutes or less than 15 minutes).

CLASS III. One-act serious play for village players (to play not longer than 40 minutes or less than 15 minutes).

CLASS IV. One-act romantic or poetic play, tragedy or comedy, for village players, (to play not longer than 40 minutes or less than 15 minutes).

NOTE. In Classes II, III, and IV, there must be no change of scene.

CLASS V. A full-length play (*i.e.*, to play two hours) suitable for village production.

RULES.

1. An entrance fee of 2/6 must be sent with each play submitted.
2. Each competitor must adopt a nom-de-plume, and must enclose his or her real name and address (together with a stamped and addressed envelope for return of MS.) in a sealed envelope attached to the play. On this envelope must be written both the nom-de-plume and the name of the play. If several plays are entered by the same author, each play must have a separate envelope. Any indication of the real name of the writer renders the play liable to disqualification.
3. Plays may be written in collaboration by two or more authors, but if a prize is won by a play written thus, its value will be divided among the collaborators.
4. The judges reserve the right not to award a prize if the standard is not sufficiently high. The judges' decision will be final.
5. Every endeavour will be made to return MSS., but no responsibility will be accepted, and it would be advisable to have two copies typed. The results will be announced as soon as possible, and no replies will be made to enquiries received while the adjudication is in progress.
6. Plays sent in must be new ones, *i.e.*, not published or already on a recommended list; this, however, does not rule out plays which have been 'tried out' on the amateur stage.
7. Plays must be clearly typed on one side of the paper only, and must be sent to Miss Scrutton, Village Drama Section, British Drama League, 8, Adelphi Terrace, W.C.2. before February 1st, 1935. Envelopes must be marked Playwriting Competition. Plays must be marked with the class for which they are intended, or they will be disqualified.

N.B. Will the Competitors look very carefully at the particulars, especially as regards time. For the guidance of beginners, a page of typewriting is taken to play a little over a minute. Special attention is also drawn to rules 1 and 2. We can not undertake any responsibility for loose stamps and blank envelopes enclosed with MSS.

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